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STUDIES IN FLOWER LANGUAGE, AND ITS APPLICATION TO CERAMIC ART.



THE old order changeth, giving place to new. Not yet a hundred years have passed since the Language of Flowers was a necessary accomplishment for all who desired to make a figure in Society, since "Boudoir Books of Blossoms" were published in scores, and learned treatises on the subject formed a part of every library whose owner had pretensions to taste. Every conceivable combination of ideas was possible of representation in a posy, according to their pedantic if poetical authors. In the gaudily garnished "Floral Emblems" of Phillips, published early in the present century, is to be found, for instance, "a design for a flower-pitcher expressing the year, month, and day of the week of the birth of his Majesty"—though it is not stated if this loyal beer-jug was ever brought into being by the potter.

According to another reverent writer on the same subject, "A well-assorted nosegay, chosen according to the approved rules of art, hath this advantage, that it speaketh every tongue, and is understood of all eyes in whatsoever nation wherein the graces of life have entered." In these days, degenerate or otherwise, flower-language is as dead as archaic Greek. It has fallen into disuse, if not into contempt, either as a vehicle of vain compliment or for the nice conduct of an intrigue. The expression of mere sentimental ideas by a *bouttonnière* of certain flowers, or by means of buds and blossoms placed in regulated positions in a bouquet, finds but little sympathy, and less understanding, even amongst the most romantic young people of the present day.

Yet the sweet unspoken utterance resembles the earlier dialects of every land in this particular, that while it is forgotten by the descendants of the noble knights and *grandes dames* of other days, it yet lingers in leafy lanes and by scented hedgerows of most rural districts, and is unmeaningly perpetuated in the prattle of cottage children everywhere.

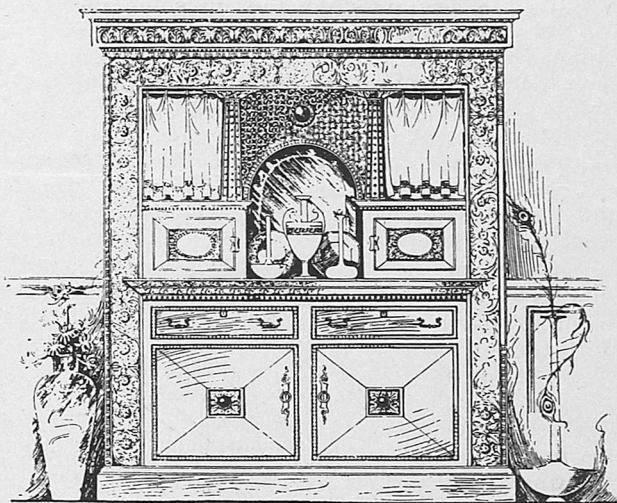


A BURN'T WOOD PANEL FROM A GERMAN DESIGN.

The reason for the decadence of the *belle langue des fleurs* amongst the cultured classes is perhaps to be found in the prostitution of its employment from the stern if graceful uses of chivalry to the delicate conceits of an age of foppish effeminacy. As when the Plantagenet bound the broom upon his helmet, so when the steel-clad German warrior plucked the meek myosotis from the margin of the torrent at his lady's

bidding, and died with "Vergiss-mein-nicht!" upon his last bubbling breath, there was meaning and purpose in the emblem.

Thus we see that in heraldic art the lingering remains of flower-lore are yet evident. Certain it is that the national significance of well-known blooms and blossoms, leaves and berries, will never die out nor their symbolism become obsolete. In this direction painter and sculptor alike are still prone to acknowledge the value of floral lore for decorative purposes the effect of such adornment being heightened tenfold when an expression either of national or family tradition can be combined with the mere graceful employment of the forms of Flora's children.



A MODERN BYZANTINE SIDEBOARD.

The rose of England, the Bourbon lilies, and the violets of the French Empire, are familiar figurative emblems everywhere. The thistles of the Stewarts and the hawthorn blossom of the Ogilvies—to cite only two well-known clannish distinctions—are equally long-lived symbols of racial pride, and there is scarcely an ancient family in the three kingdoms but can lend its special "favour" of flower or foliage, of fruit or fern-frond, to the service of the decorative artist when he is adding the last graces to the creations of the architect.

Just as Tennyson says that—

"Any man who walks the mead
In bud or blade or bloom may find
A meaning suited to his mind—"

so the conscientious decorator often discovers in such quasi-heraldic distinctions a boundless field for elaboration, alike flattering to the feelings of his patrons and creditable to the conceptive power of his genius.

But, as we are endeavoring to point out in this series of reproductions, the conventional combinations of briar and blossom, leaf and tendril, are not sufficient to the end in view. There are higher developments possible beyond the ordinary range of patterns and groundwork with which we have so long been familiarized. To speak of a parallel if dissimilar branch of art decoration, Mr. Stacy Marks has shown us in his superb productions at Eaton Hall how, from the quaint posturings and bizarre bedizenments of certain tropic birds, an extensive range of human expressions may be evoked by the touch of the true artist. His work is gracefully comic, yet, being intensely true to life, it never descends into caricature.

The gifted Frenchman who has designed the present series of "Enfantillages" has opened out a yet newer field of fancy. His work tempts us to ask whether it is not worth while for our decorators to revive the pleasant fancies of our grandsires' days; to restudy the old lore, and to evolve from the decaying imagery of the past some novelty of suggestion, some fresher flights of fancy, such as may develop into notable additions to our available stores of beauty.

The *Convolvulus*, "in streaked vases flush," to quote Keats, is the subject of the plaque under immediate notice. It appears to have had several divergent meanings in the flower-lore of various countries. English authorities ascribe to it two distinct significations. In their lexicons its message is given as "Extinguished hopes" and "Dangerous insinuation."

These interpretations, however, seem to have been applied more particularly to the wild bind-weed—"the devil's garters" in Ireland; the "Virgin's nightcap" in old Somersetshire folklore. In France the cultivated convolvulus is "*liens d'amour*," or "bonds of love"—holding a place more generally occupied by the honeysuckle in English flower-language. Naturally M. Boullemier, as a Frenchman, adopts the French signification, and so we have the childlike spirit of the cup-like *belle-de-jour* fondling the dove, the bird of Venus, and girl with diaphanous bonds of airy texture, twining tendrils-like around its fairy form. It is like the wild bind-weed—

"Copious of flowers, but pale and wan—"

but the jewel-bearing, ever-climbing bine of the garden, that the painter has selected, and upon it he has lavished what the Laureate calls—



"The lustre of the long convolvulus,
That coil'd around the stately stems, and ran
Even to the limits of the land."

The clinging, ever-blossoming love of woman, as dealized in M. Boullemier's conception, has never been better expressed than in the tender lines of Cowper, whose climbing flowers—

"Catch the neighboring shrub
With clasping tendrils and invest the branch,
Else unadorned, with many a gay festoon
And fragrant chaplet, recompensing well
The strength they borrow with the grace they lend."

The possibilities of such delightful fancies as these for the decoration of a boudoir or a festal hall, it will be seen, are boundless.

Let us suppose that a motto-subject is chosen for a frieze or a series of panels; that the theme is translated word by word and phrase by phrase into the old-time flower emblems; and that these again are daintily idealized in the method adopted by M. Boullemier, there seems positively no limit to the opportunities for creative genius in imaginative design, or for technical skill in richness or delicacy of treatment. The nymphs and cupids, the piping Pans and smirking satyrs of classic times have marched in endless processions on our friezes long enough. Surely the time has come for the introduction of something novel in domestic decoration.

IT IS found that among the ultra fashionable—among people who have means to spend without limit—that the lamp shade composed of silks, laces and other materials is likely to be replaced by a more expensive form, namely, cut-glass, and spun glass shades.



COMPETITIVE DESIGN FOR STAINED GLASS WINDOW. BY C. M. SHEAN.